

History to Go: Why iTeach with iPods

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IPODS ARE ONE OF THE hottest selling gadgets on the market. They are everywhere, and that includes college campuses. Duke University initially distributed iPods to all incoming freshmen and then moved to a classroom focus,¹ and even smaller campuses, such as Georgia College & State University, have gotten considerable publicity for their innovative uses of the iPod.² Institutions, such as Stanford, are also embracing podcasting, a phenomenon that is literally only a few months old.³ Educational use of iPods has not been without its iControversy, as many wonder whether these ubiquitous devices are really achieving educational goals so much as they are providing an entertainment outlet for students.⁴ iPods do have educational uses, and since students also enjoy them as entertainment devices, this may have unexpected advantages for instructors. Results of a recent podcasting project in a graduate level course on historical methods and interpretation suggest that iPods are not just toys and podcasting is not just a fad. When applications are based on solid learning theory and designed with appropriate outcomes in mind, they can transform the educational experience for students, build communities of learners, promote more active engagement of materials, and achieve the learning outcomes essential for the study of history.

Description of the Project

My aim in my graduate level course in historical methods and interpretations was to acquaint students with the major trends in historiography and to provide exposure to research methods in many different areas of history. Requirements included several oral presentations on the methods and historiographical theses of major historians, research projects in local and oral history and genealogy, a book review of a biographical monograph, and a major research paper on a topic related to the student's research interests. I wanted to see whether iPods could help to develop research skills essential for the study of history. Beyond that, I wanted to use iPods to develop students' oral skills and a greater sense of immersion in the course materials. My approach to the iPod project in this course was substantially different than that of many of my colleagues around the nation.

Typically, instructors use the iPod and podcasting to distribute their lectures for review or, in the case of some of my colleagues in the arts, to present music for required listening or paintings for viewing assignments. Given the numbers of students I see on my campus walking around who appear to be inseparably fused to their iPods, applications like this are obviously popular among the students. Although students like the portability of the iPod and that alone makes it worth considering as an educational tool, I am a firm believer in using technology only when it allows me to accomplish something better than I can do without it.

Consequently, I wanted to go one step further and to create an application that relied on the student as producer to foster an active learning environment, especially since the aim of the historical methods and interpretation class was to create students with the skills to become professional historians. The Greek word *historien* is a verb of action, and history demands that students engage in active inquiry rather than be passive receptors of facts. I did not want the iPod to become something that students just listened to passively, as they often do during lecture presentations. I wanted them to use it to produce something reflecting the fruits of their own inquiries that would also spark the imaginations of the other students. I also designed my own materials to be distributed via the iPod as short, highly interactive exercises that demanded the development of specific historical skills.

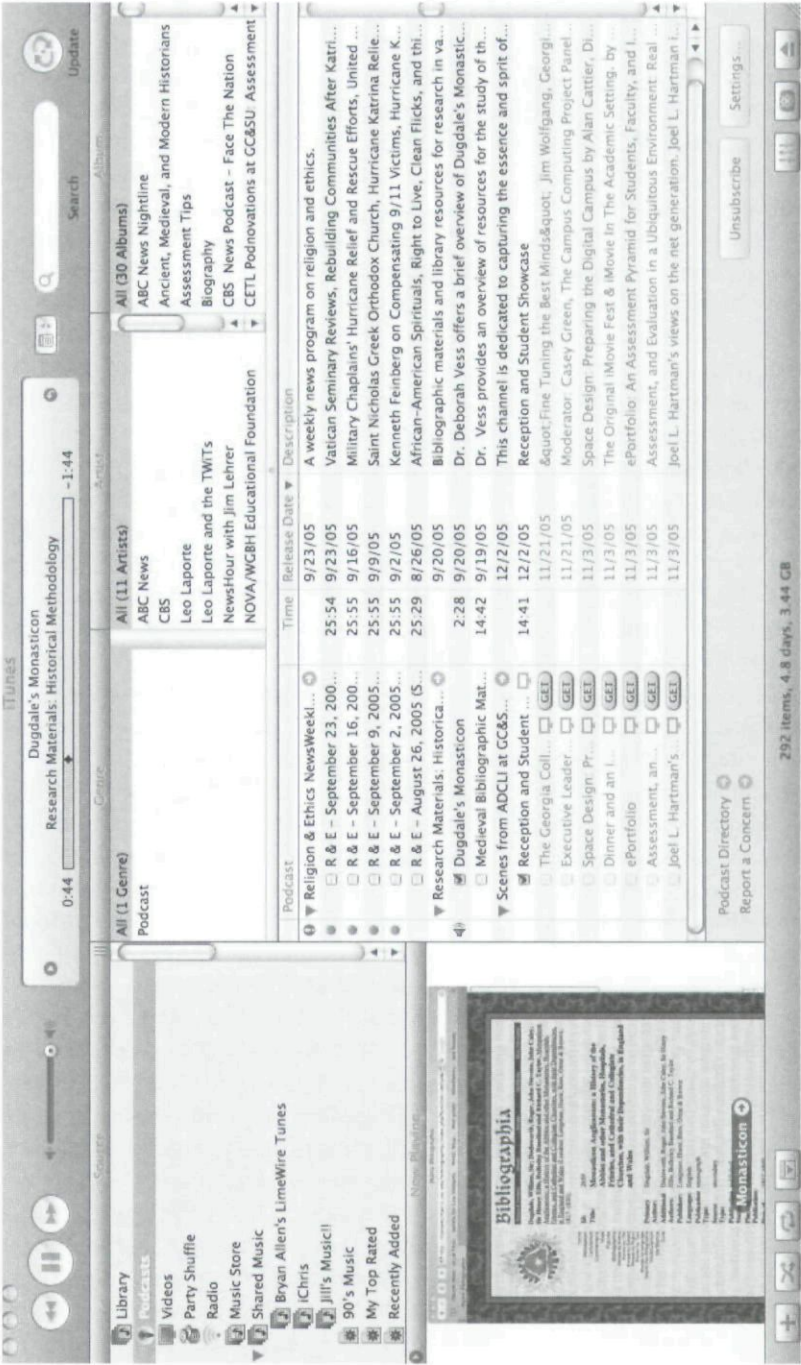
The eight students in the fall 2005 course received photo iPods and Griffin iTalk microphones, which plug into iPods and allow users to record audio presentations.⁵ Students recorded their oral presentations directly to the iPod using the voice memo function of the iPod. Students moved their voice memos over to their desktops and into iTunes, avail-

able for the MAC or PC, simply by connecting the iPod to a desktop computer which automatically synchs it to the desktop. From iTunes, students then sent the files to the instructor via e-mail. Because some of the audio files were so large that our campus server blocked them as attachments, students used yousendit.com, a free service on the Internet, to deliver the files. The instructor then uploaded the audio files to the campus podcasting server. Fortunately, the campus server automatically wrote the required RSS (Really Simple Syndication) file and updated it every time a new episode was added. Students could then access all the presentations of their peers by subscribing to the podcasting channels reserved for the course in iTunes. Since iTunes 4.9 or above is the required gateway to access podcasts, even faculty and students who do not have access to iPods can replicate this project. For those who do, syncing the iPod to iTunes on one's desktop automatically transfers the podcasts to the iPod. I set up one channel for each course topic, and students downloaded the presentations before the class meetings, previewed them, and then discussed them in class. Each presentation was between five and fifteen minutes in length, depending on the assignment.

While most of the student podcasts were audio files only, I also prepared enhanced podcasts, which contained embedded images that can be hyperlinked to websites. While the iPod is not wired for Internet connection, students could click on these links when viewing the podcasts in iTunes. The iPod will, however, display images, though the display was rather small before the fifth generation video iPods came out. I produced the enhanced podcasts using Chaptertoolme, which is freeware available for the MAC and very easy to master.⁶ My materials attempted to train students to use various databases essential for historical research and to introduce students to the most important resources in various areas of history. Enhanced podcasts were also useful for orienting students to the use of the Internet for research, because screen captures of various tools found on useful sites could be linked to the actual websites discussed in the audio presentation. Students then completed exercises using the online databases. For example, I created an enhanced podcast to train students to use Dugdale's *Monasticon*, a resource for the study of monasticism now available on the Web (Figure 1),⁷ while one of my students designed an enhanced podcast exploring primary sources and other resources available through the presidential libraries.

Students could stop and start the podcasts over again while they explored embedded hyperlinks. There is also an advantage for students in that they can review podcasts, whereas classroom presentations are a more linear experience that students cannot repeat once they are completed. Another advantage of using podcasts is that class time is freed up

Figure 1: Screen capture of enhanced podcast



for discussion and higher order learning activities. Although my course had only eight students in it, due to the intense discussions I demand of students, we could not complete eight presentations in a three-hour session. The availability of the presentations on the podcasts before the class allowed us to focus on important issues, trends, and historiographical theories that otherwise might have gone unexplored. To maximize use of these resources and to further focus discussion, it is very useful to have students complete written assignments based on the podcasts before the class meetings. I accomplished this through use of a course blog site, where I would post open-ended questions to generate discussion. While it would have been possible to more closely fuse the blog site and the audio files by "audio blogging," or having students post audio files instead of text to the blog, podcasting with iTunes allowed me to organize the podcasts by topic and the students to download all the files at once on the topic under discussion.

The Notes Function of the iPod

Instructors can also distribute transcriptions of the podcasts or supplementary notes via the notes function on the iPod. In this case, I distributed brief summaries of the major databases and research tools for various historical periods and topics and encouraged my colleagues in the department to submit bibliographies that would be of use in their areas. Text distributed via the notes function must be no larger than 4K in size, and various third-party software applications are available that separate longer texts into manageable chapters. Sometimes the chapter divisions are not convenient, but instructors can edit those to their liking. The notes function also allows one to enhance text files through hyperlinks to audio and image files. In order to distribute notes to students on the iPods, the iPod has to be set to function as an external drive, which can easily be done through iTunes after connecting the iPod. Once the student's iPod is set up to function as an external drive, instructors can simply copy over files to the notes folder. Students could also exchange PowerPoint and other large files using the external drive function of the iPod. Transferring the files can consume large amounts of class time, so it is usually best to prepare all the notes one wants to distribute before the semester starts and preload them onto the iPods. Alternatively, one might reserve time outside of class when students can get their iPods updated with new materials.

The notes function is one of the most valuable tools on the iPod. My students could take their iPods into the library, look for the required resources, and then work through assignments or review important mate-

rials with their iPods. In this case, the iPod was the equivalent to having a personal tutor working with them. While reading text on a small screen is not the ideal context for reading, students found that the convenience of having materials right at their fingertips more than outweighed the potential inconvenience of reading electronic text in miniature form. While I might have distributed these materials on the Web, they would not have been as accessible as they were on the iPod, which students could take anywhere they went.

Other Uses for the Voice Memo Function

As noted above, the voice memo function of the iPod allows users to record oral presentations, but many of my students also began to take audio notes for their research papers. Students who found resources in the library or elsewhere could quickly record references to the iPod using their iTalk mikes and the voice notes function. Students often recorded citation information or even brief synopses of articles for use later when drafting their annotated bibliographies. Many students remarked that this application was among the most useful of all the applications of the iPod. Instructors might also find it useful to record feedback on assignments, as students often enjoy the personalized touch of hearing the instructor's voice.

How Students used the iPods in Their Oral and Local History Projects

Of all the assignments students completed using the iPod, the oral history project was not only the most popular, but the most effective. Milledgeville, Georgia, is fortunate to have a large Cuban community. Many of these Cuban-Americans immigrated to the United States following the Revolution. Several Cuban doctors came to Milledgeville to work at Central State Hospital, one of the world's largest mental institutions. I worked with a colleague who is a Latin Americanist interested in tapping this local resource for further research. After the class had a session on basic oral history techniques, we put the students in groups and assigned them a subject to interview. We provided background on the Cuban Revolution and also helped the students to develop an appropriate set of questions. Student teams recorded their interviews on the iPods. Since all the students had iPods, we had several backups of the recording and could pick the one whose sound quality was the best. Because iPods are small and less intrusive than video cameras or other recording devices they are less likely to make subjects nervous.

Students analyzed the interviews and then produced their own podcast discussions of important trends, inconsistencies, and areas for further investigation. Because only one or two scholars had attempted to probe the history of the local Cuban community, the project provided a further basis for the research of my colleague, a junior faculty member. It also interested the students enough so that many are considering doing their master's theses on the topic. Because anyone could access the interviews through the class podcasting channel, the material has inspired others to work on the topic as well. In fact, one of my students was a teacher in the public schools, and she brought the interviews into her classroom. Her students, who were largely underprivileged African-Americans, were so overwhelmed by the stories of Cubans who overcame their own hardships that the school later asked my student to develop a curriculum unit for next year around the interviews. Not only can future students in this and other courses build on this work, but the availability of these resources as podcasts highlights the power of new technologies to break down the walls of the traditional classroom. This project enhanced faculty collaboration in my department, enabled us to make links between various areas of the curriculum, and forged partnerships with other educational institutions on different levels of the educational spectrum.

Another successful project dealt with local history. Milledgeville was the antebellum capital of Georgia and our department offers an advanced course in local history. The methods course requires a research project on the history of Milledgeville that makes use of courthouse and other local records. My students researched the rather interesting history of our own departmental building, which was connected to Dr. Joseph Hill White, an important figure in American medical history. Previously, students completed written summaries of their findings, but in this case my students were also able to record presentations on the iPod. These will not only be available for future students in the methods course, but also for use by future students in the advanced course on local history and by anyone with an interest in the history of the town. Unlike hard copy files, the podcasts are available at any hour of the day or night. Our experience indicates that a well-designed local history project might also make use of oral histories, thereby providing another means for integrating the course materials through technology.⁸ Another class project dealing with genealogy similarly used iPods for family interviews along with several research databases, and in general, these and our previous interviews proved to be the most successful application of the iPod in the course.

Learning Outcomes

On a survey administered at the end of the semester, several students reported that the iPod helped to develop greater confidence in their oral skills, especially in front of the class. Students reported recording their presentations over and over until they were perfected, spending considerably more time on them than they would have done if they had simply been required to present them in class. Other students remarked that the iPod recordings promoted greater discipline in their work habits, as they had to "plan more...[and to] keep up the reading and preparation, rather than waiting until the last minute to complete everything." Students also commented that recording their presentations allowed them to review their own work in order to select the most important points for classroom presentation. From this point of view alone, the iPod prompted more reflection and a more sustained attempt to improve oral skills than is usually the case in a traditional classroom situation.

Podcasting may have other benefits as well. Experts on error correction in composition indicate that students who read their work aloud often correct their written errors as they go. Frequently, students may not be able to recognize that there are errors on the written page even though they correct them in their oral presentations. Repeated practice in reading papers aloud improves students' abilities to spot errors in the written text.⁹ Indeed, the podcasting experiment in this class enabled one student with particularly weak writing skills to improve her presentations dramatically. She commented that when she heard herself reading on the iPod, she became aware of organizational and other writing problems in her papers. This student reported revising her written materials repeatedly to produce a single podcast, and remarked that now she could not imagine completing assignments without the benefit of her iPod. Significantly, the student's weakest performance on a writing assignment was the only one that was not the subject of a required podcast. In her case, the connection between reading aloud and writing was so significant that her work suffered without it. Another student commented on the surveys, administered at the end of the term, that she "had to know how to apply the material to the assignments in new ways...talking about the material (and knowing that everyone would hear it) was much more challenging than just thinking about or writing about the material." As still another student put it, podcasting "helped [to] process what had [been] written."

The results of this project might remind one of the ancient and medieval practice of realizing text primarily through the spoken word. Every text was a "score for public or private performance."¹⁰ Texts had an audience, creating a circular loop between the author, his or her ideas,

and the audience, what Dorothy Sayers once called “the thing which flows back to the writer from his own activity.”¹¹ People experienced texts and their ideas in a communal, public context. Today, “we have reached such a state of dependence on the printed word that we are no longer in the habit of turning most of what we read with the eye into sounds that can be heard with the ear.”¹² Augustine of Hippo once reacted with amazement at seeing Ambrose reading silently,¹³ and perhaps we have lost something significant as we have moved from the spoken word, to the written word, to the printed word, and finally, to electronic communications.¹⁴ While some philosophers have questioned whether digital environments may take us even further away from the public realization of texts,¹⁵ the experience of my class with the iPod project had exactly the opposite effect, forcing students to encounter their written texts and those of their peers through oral, public performances. A.K. Gavrilov notes that there is an intimate connection between reading aloud and reading silently and that the one strengthens the other,¹⁶ which may be another advantage of oral presentations that are shared through podcasting.

Use of a course blog site in conjunction with the podcasts produced other advantages. The instructor required students to post to the blog weekly, so that students could further process materials in the podcasts and integrate them with the classroom discussions. While there may be links between oral realizations of text and improved writing ability, writing itself is a very different form of communication than speaking and it is governed by its own rules of discourse.¹⁷ Writing is “a unique mode of learning...”¹⁸ that “makes it harder for students to remain passive.”¹⁹ Writing reinforces knowledge and makes it easier to retain²⁰ and is a “tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding.”²¹ Walter J. Ong has noted that writing may actually restructure one’s consciousness.²² Consequently, I designed the blog postings based on the “writing to learn” approach. Students were to summarize important points in the weekly materials and to note important questions for further exploration, significant analytical points, and differences of interpretation. Blog postings took advantage of the connections forged between oral recitations and writing by demanding yet another level of processing of the course materials.

One student noted on the end of the semester surveys that they “loved being able to process information in more ways than one.” While this was often the case, students clearly did not want redundancy, and they remarked on the surveys that they did not enjoy hearing their peers simply repeat their podcasts in class. The multiple layers of processing prompted students to demand of their peers higher order thinking in class, as they

wanted to hear more discussion of areas of the research that demanded further investigation and for their peers to help them make links between topics. Students also wanted to be prompted to process meta-questions related to their readings in the philosophy of history and historiography.

Studies suggest that hybrid courses, which include both face-to-face and online components, may foster greater interaction between students.²³ This was certainly true in the methods course, as the availability of the podcasts for review before class discussions created a much more open atmosphere for discussion. One reason may be the additional time given to think about material in podcasts before class discussions.²⁴ One student remarked that she could absorb the information better at home on the iPod than in the classroom. Students reported being very energized and inspired by the class discussions, and that the exchange of ideas went beyond what they normally experienced in classes. For them, this was the most valuable aspect of the course. Freed from having to devote class time to student presentations, students were much more able to enter into the kind of discourse that leads to the development of higher order skills. Research also suggests that hybrid courses may develop a greater sense of community than traditional face-to-face courses.²⁵ The level of interaction in the class was certainly evidence of this, and by the end of the class, students began to arrange to exchange feedback on each other's work even before they posted remarks to the course blog site, distributed podcasts, or made presentations in class. The students became a true community of learners, a community that will likely outlast enrollment in the course.

The portability of the iPods was a very positive thing for students, and it prompted more continuous engagement with course topics. One student remarked that, "the fact that you can listen to a podcast in your car, at the library, etc., makes it much easier to become 'immersed in the subject' And that, I feel, is an essential part of learning - being constantly engaged with the subject. The iPod 'almost functions' like a traveling classroom." This was especially important for a one-day-a-week class."

The overall success of this podcasting project suggests that widespread familiarity with Mp3 players and other devices similar to the iPod "broadens educational options in a non-threatening and easily accessible manner."²⁶ While none of my students had ever specifically used an iPod, when asked on a survey administered at the beginning of the term what they hoped to get out of the educational use of the iPod, all but one mentioned that they were simply excited that they would learn how to use the technology. Only one of the students had any idea that educational goals might be achieved through use of the iPod. Three of the students were non-traditional, and one of these already had a Ph.D. in another field. In contrast, on the surveys administered at the end of the course,

students had moved from a focus on learning to use the iPods to an emphasis on the academic skills they developed and the overall educational benefits of the project. Clearly, student interest in learning how to use a widely known entertainment device opened the door for them to discover unimagined educational benefits.

Challenges

Students did, however, universally remark that they needed more training prior to beginning their projects. Instructors who implement such projects can expect to spend a great deal of time coaching students through the basic steps necessary to achieve the desired product. Students were often frustrated in the beginning of the course by difficulties encountered when sending the files to the instructor. iPods may be everywhere, but the features of the iPod that allow one to record a podcast are not the ones most often used. In fact, none of the students reported even knowing how to make an audio recording on a computer before the project began. My students often relied on support staff for technical help, but instructors can also expect to spend large amounts of time uploading podcasts and dealing with other technical problems. In the event your campus does not have a server that automatically writes the RSS files, instructors can expect to spend even more time learning to use RSS and to create the required feeds. Audio quality is another issue, since iTalk mikes are effective to a point, but can occasionally produce audio that is less than superior in quality.

Despite the many challenges of the project, students remarked that the iPod was a "unique way of approaching learning" and that they saw it as an "essential component of the learning cycle." They were delighted to be known as the first "pod squad" in the history department and were uniformly positive about the project. Even after the course ended, they continued to correspond with me via e-mail about their learning experience. Though they often remarked on the amount of time the podcasting projects took every week, it is clear that they derived a great deal of benefit from them. That the iPod project transformed the students' approach to learning is also evident in the fact that the students used the iPod for projects not related to the class. One of my students channeled her knowledge into creating an enhanced podcast for a photographic exhibit at one of the museums on campus. Clearly, students learned not only skills important for the study of history, but in the end, they did also fulfill their initial desire to learn how to make innovative use of iPod technology.

Conclusion

The most significant aspect of the iPod project was that it created a learner-centered environment that not only prompted more continuous engagement with course material, but also encouraged active learning and a stronger sense of a community of explorers working towards a common goal. The extent to which iPods are permeating the educational environment is a wake up call for historians. We are encountering students who are more wired than ever before, and the more we take advantage of the natural comfort zones students, the more we may be able to reach them in educationally profound ways. Our teaching methods may have to adapt to these new realities. The iPod is a visible manifesto of a new kind of student, one who demands an active role in the learning process and control over when they access materials.

As technology continues to develop, it is going to be more and more possible to allow students a new kind of agency in the creation of knowledge. At the end of the fall 2005 term, Apple announced the debut of the video iPod. Having just completed my first and rather tenuous venture into iTeaching with iPods, I was excited about the potential of the video iPods, even if the need to keep pace with new developments made me feel a little frantic. Nevertheless, I can find some comfort in the knowledge that the podcasting projects produced a dedicated, tightly knit group of graduate students whose appreciation of history was forever enriched, and that is the most important reason why iTeach with iPods.

Notes

1. Educators have criticized Duke's initial project to distribute iPods to freshmen for its failure to focus on educational outcomes. See Brock Read, "Seriously, iPods are Educational," *Chronicle of Higher Education: Information Technology* (March 18, 2005); available online <<http://ipod.gcsu.edu/pdf/chronicle031805.pdf>>; last accessed December 15, 2005.

2. "Profiles in Success: Georgia College & State University: A Pocketful of Learning," *Apple Education Resources*, available online <<http://www.apple.com/education/profiles/georgia/>>; last accessed December 15, 2005; "iPods Enhance Study in Georgia," *MacWorld* (August 17, 2004); available online <<http://www.macworld.co.uk/news/index.cfm?NewsID=9407>>, last accessed, December 15, 2005; "iPods to 'Help U.S. Students Study,'" *BBC News*, available online <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3913091.stm>>, last accessed December 15, 2005.

3. For an introduction to podcasting, see Gardner Campbell, "There's Something in the Air: Podcasting in Education," *Educause* (November/December 2005): 33-46;

available online <<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0561.pdf>>, last accessed December 12, 2005; "7 Things You Should Know About Podcasting," in *Educause Learning Initiative*, July 2005; available online <<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7003.pdf>>, last accessed on December 12, 2005.

4. Mikhael Blaisdell, "iPods at the Gate," *Campus Technology* (November 2004); available online <<http://www.campus-technology.com/article.asp?id=10201>>, last accessed December 12, 2005; see also Read for criticism of Duke's project.

5. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Jim Wolfgang, CIO of Georgia College & State University, to Dr. Frank Lowney, Director of Web Enabled Resources, and to Teresa Brewton, iPod coordinator, for supporting my iPod project. Most importantly, we owe a debt of gratitude to our president, Dr. Dorothy Leland, and to our Academic Vice President and Dean of Faculties, Dr. Anne V. Gormly, for their enthusiastic support of iLearning.

6. Although there are applications for windows-based machines, such as Windows Media Encoder and File Editor, they are far more cumbersome to use.

7. Dugdale's *Monasticon* is available online at <<http://monasticmatrix.org/bibliographia/?function=detail&id=2659&PHPSESSID=d9ffab5f09b0b5b3afb639f7df6da114>>; last accessed December 15, 2005.

8. I wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues, Drs. Jesse Hingson and Bob Wilson, for their help on the oral and local history projects.

9. David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," in *Writing on the Margins: Essays on Composition and Teaching* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 19-35.

10. E.J. Kenney, *Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Vol. II Latin Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12.

11. Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London: Methuen, 1941), 30.

12. William B. Thompson, "Reading the Classics—Aloud," *Greece and Rome, 2nd Series Volume 9, Supplement: Reappraisal* (March 1962), 19.

13. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, VI.3.

14. These are the divisions proposed by Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982; rpt. New York: Methuen, 1988), 2-3.

15. Albert Borgmann, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 213-233.

16. A.K. Gavrilov, "Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *Classical Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 1 (1977): 56-73. On this basis as well, however, Gavrilov challenges the assumption that the ancients never read silently.

17. Bartholomae, 24.

18. J. Emig, "Writing as a mode of learning," *College Composition and Communication* 28 (1977), 122.

19. Toby Fulweiler, "Journals Across the Disciplines," *English Journal* Vol. 69, No. 12 (1980), 14.

20. Emig, 122.

21. Toby Fulweiler and Art Young, *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1982), x.

22. Ong, chapter 4.

23. Carla Garnham and Robert Kaleta, "Introduction to Hybrid Courses," in *Teaching with Technology Today* Vol. 8, No. 2 (March 20, 2002); available online <<http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/garnham.htm>>, last accessed, December 15, 2005.

24. The phenomenon of lag time is a well-known advantage of online learning.

See D.R. Garrison and T. Anderson, *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice* (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2003).

25. Alfred P. Rovai and Hope M. Jordan, "Blended Learning and Sense of Community: A Comparative Analysis with Traditional and Fully Online Graduate Courses," in *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* (August 2004), available online <<http://www.irrodl.org/content/v5.2/rovai-jordan.html>>, last accessed December 15, 2005; Robert Heckman and Hala Annabi, "A Content Analytic Comparison of Learning Processes in Online and Face-to-Face Case Study Discussions," in *The Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* Vol. 10, No. 2 (2005): article 7, available online <<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/heckman.html>>, last accessed September 28, 2005; David G. Brown, "Hybrid Courses Are Best," *Syllabus: New Dimensions in Education Technology* (August 2001), available online <<http://www.wfu.edu/~brown/Syllabus%20Articles/SylHybrid%20Courses.htm>>, last accessed December 20, 2005.

26. "7 Things You Should Know About Podcasting," paragraph 11.

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